

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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STEEL SHOT PROPOSED FOR WATERFOWL HUNTING THIS YEAR IN NINE STATES ALONG THE ATLANTIC COAST

Steel shot has been proposed for waterfowl hunting in designated zones in nine States along the Atlantic Flyway this autumn, Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced in the Federal Register on July 28, 1976.

Public comments are invited on this proposal through August 23, 1976.

It is estimated that about 2 million ducks die in the United States each year from lead poisoning that results when birds swallow spent shot-gun pellets while feeding on marsh bottoms and other waterfowl feeding areas that are used by hunters.

The proposal to begin using steel shot in zones of the Atlantic Flyway is based upon the finding that the problem is most widespread in this flyway. Serious problems do exist in western flyways but they are more localized. The progressive implementation of the program westward over the next 3 years is designed to allow time for ammunition manufacturers to develop production capabilities. While steel shot is the only available substitute for lead at the present time, other types of non-toxic shot are being investigated and may be available in the future.

The steel shot proposal was made only after intensive studies of the problem, extensive public debate on available courses of action to correct it, and the publication by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of a final environmental impact statement. Among the major conclusions of the impact study are:

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--Fall flights of waterfowl average 100 million birds, of which 20 million are removed by hunting and an additional 20 to 25 million die of other causes.

--From 1.6 to 2.4 million ducks die each year from lead poisoning, and many others are no doubt weakened by the presence of lead in their bodies.

--Lead shot pellets are being deposited by waterfowl hunters at a rate of 3,000 tons a year in the United States.

--Lead shot is showing up in the digestive tracts of waterfowl in about the same proportions as it did in the 1950's.

--Lead levels in the tissues of ducks are highest along the Atlantic Coast and lowest in the Central Flyway.

When a ban on lead shot was proposed in 1973, opponents said that the switch to steel shot would result in more unretrieved ducks than are now dying from lead poisoning. Since steel is less dense than lead, it was claimed that a shot charge of steel pellets would have less striking energy, and hence would be less effective in bagging ducks than a shot charge of lead pellets. However, field tests have shown that there is little difference in the effectiveness of standard 1-1/4 oz. lead shot waterfowl loads and 1-1/8 oz. steel shot loads.

Although steel shot has not been widely used, 1,500,000 rounds have been fired under actual field conditions in Federal and State tests since 1972.

The waterfowl hunter's "grapevine" has since been humming with stories about steel shot and the things it will do to both shotguns and hunters. Among them are:

- Shotgun barrels bursting in the field.
- Barrels deforming or being scratched by steel pellets.
- Steel pellets ricocheting more violently than lead.
- Higher costs for steel shot.

All of these points and others were addressed in the final environmental statement on the use of steel shot for waterfowl hunting. The major points made in the report were as follows:

- Barrel scratching or erosion by steel pellets is not a problem because of the protective liners enclosing the shot column in modern shells.
- Choke expansion in gun barrels after using steel shot has been slight or non-existent in modern American single barreled shotguns.
- Choke expansion in some double barreled shotguns, some foreign-made guns, and older guns can be more serious.
- Steel shot will cost as much as 50 percent more per box than lead.
- Barrel bursts have occurred with steel shot due to barrel obstructions, but similar bursts can and do occur with lead if barrels are obstructed.

The proposed program for 1976 involves the use of steel shot in those zones of the Atlantic Flyway where waterfowl are harvested at the highest and most intensive levels. The areas proposed are believed to represent some of the most critical problem areas in the flyway due to the deposit of large quantities of pellets each year. Adequate supplies of 12-gauge ammunition will be available to hunters through the retail outlets located in these zones, though 16-gauge will not be available and 20-gauge might be hard to find readily.

As a result of discussions with the States involved, the Service has proposed the following specific areas in the Atlantic Flyway in which the use of steel shot would be required for hunting waterfowl beginning with the 1976 waterfowl hunting season:

Delaware--On the following State wildlife management areas: Woodland Beach, Little Creek, Gordon's Pond, Assawoman, and Prime Hook.

Florida--In that portion of Brevard County lying east of Interstate Highway 95.

Maine--On the waters of the Kennebec River, known as Merrymeeting Bay, bounded by the high tension wires at Chop's Point to the first dam on the Androscoggin River, to the first road bridge on the Muddy, Cathance,

Abbagadasset, and Eastern Rivers, and the Richmond-Dresden Bridge on the Kennebec River, and within a 150-yard zone of land adjacent to the margins of these waters, being in the Counties of Cumberland, Sagadahoc, and Lincoln.

Maryland--In Dorchester County on all open waters, lakes, ponds, marshes, swamps, rivers, and streams, and within a 150-yard zone of land adjacent to the margin of such waters. Cropland drainage ditches in cultivated fields and temporary sheet water on cultivated fields will be excluded from this provision.

Massachusetts--Within that portion of Essex County bounded on the north by the Massachusetts-New Hampshire State line; on the west by U.S. Route 1, from its intersection with the Massachusetts-New Hampshire State line southward to its juncture with Route 1A in Newburyport, thence southward on Route 1A to its juncture with Route 133 south of Ipswich, thence southeastward on Route 133 to its juncture with Route 128; bounded on the south by Route 128 from its juncture with Route 133 eastward to the west bank of the Annisquam River; bounded on the east by the west bank of the Annisquam River northward to Ipswich Bay and continuing northward along the shoreline of Ipswich Bay and the Atlantic Ocean to the Massachusetts-New Hampshire State line.

New Jersey--In that portion of Atlantic County lying east of the Garden State Parkway.

New York--In those portions of Nassau and Suffolk Counties bounded on the south by the Long Island shoreline from the Robert Moses Causeway west to the Nassau County-New York City line; on the west by the New York City-Nassau County line northward from Long Island Sound to the Sunrise Highway (Rt. 27); on the north by the Sunrise Highway (Rt. 27) eastward to its juncture with the Captree Highway (Robert Moses Causeway); on the east by the Captree Highway (Robert Moses Causeway) southward to its terminus at Fire Island Inlet.

North Carolina--In Currituck County on all open waters, lakes, ponds, marshes, swamps, rivers, and streams, and within a 150-yard zone of land adjacent to the margin of such waters. Cropland drainage ditches in cultivated fields and temporary sheet water on cultivated fields will be excluded from this provision.

Virginia--In the City of Virginia Beach on Back Bay and its tributaries and the marshes adjacent thereto, and the land and marshes between Back Bay and the Atlantic Ocean from Sandbridge to the North Carolina line, and the shore of North Landing River and the marshes adjacent thereto and along the shore of Lake Tecumseh and Red Wing Lake and the marshes adjacent thereto.

The period of public comment will extend from July 28, 1976, until August 23, 1976. Interested persons may participate in this rulemaking by submitting written comments to the Director (FWS/MBM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.